

Attachment B

MARSHALL CREEK
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
FEE TITLE ACQUISITION
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
July, 2010

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the acquisition on local governments and local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of property from the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Trust for Public Land (TPL). (This land currently is owned by Plum Creek Timber Company and is under contract to be sold to TNC and TPL.) The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title acquisition.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The Marshall property is located approximately 5 miles northwest of Seeley Lake, MT. The property that FWP would acquire encompasses 24,170 acres with no in-holdings and is crossed by the West Fork of the Clearwater, Marshall Creek, Deer Creek and the North Fork of Placid Creek. This property is located in a large, undeveloped forested corridor and provides wildlife connectivity between the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wilderness and the Mission Mountains. For a detailed property description see the Environmental Assessment.

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

The property is mostly forested with intact riparian buffers along the streams within the property boundaries. Elevations range from 2400 ft. to 6600 ft. Spotted knapweed is the most common noxious weed on the property and is generally found along the roadways.

The property provides habitat for grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and bull trout which are federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The property also supports a number of candidate species for the ESA including fisher and westslope cutthroat trout. Elk, white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, and a host of other species (over 160 including 30 or more that are on the Montana Species of Concern list) call this property home or use it seasonally. A list of species is included in the Environmental Assessment.

C. Current Use

Currently the property is owned and managed by Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC) and has been managed for timber for at least the past 50 years. The property is in varying stages of regeneration. The property is also highly valued for its recreational values which include hunting, fishing, hiking, winter sports, camping and sightseeing, all of which PCTC allowed.

The Forest Service also has a cost-share road agreement with the current owner that allows agency personnel and the public to access Forest Service lands adjacent to the property.

D. Purchase Alternatives

- 1) Purchase the property fee title.
- 2) No fee title purchase

FWP Fee Title Purchase: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks plans to designate this property as a wildlife management area. The goal is to protect and enhance the fisheries and wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities that meet the management plan's guidelines. Under FWP management hunting, hiking, fishing, and other recreational activities would be allowed, while protecting a large unbroken area of forested habitat.

No Purchase Alternative: The no purchase alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property would vary depending on what The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land may do with the property if FWP does not purchase the property. A very real possibility is the sale of the property to a private entity that may not choose to protect the wildlife and fisheries habitat nor provide for public access.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The fee title purchase of the 24,170 acres of land from TNC/TPL would provide long-term protection of important wildlife and fisheries habitat and provide for public access to the land. This section describes the social and economic impacts of the fee title purchase.

The financial impacts address the cost of the fee title acquisition by FWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies.

The recreational activities that would occur on and adjacent to the property as well as the maintenance work on the property would provide information on the impacts the purchase may have on local businesses.

A. Financial Impacts

FWP proposes to purchase the property in two phases following TNC/TPL gaining title from Plum Creek Timber Company. While FWP plans to purchase the property in phases, the total cost of the property is expected to be \$18.4 million dollars. The funding for this project would come from a number of sources: US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grant, USFWS State Wildlife Grant, US Department of Agriculture Forest Legacy Program Grant, FWP Habitat Montana Program, FWP Hunting Access Enhancement Funds, and private funds donated by the Blackfoot Challenge.

Senate Bill 164 passed by the 2009 legislature directs that FWP establish a maintenance account to address maintenance requirements defined in the bill. With regard to this proposed purchase the maintenance account would be \$300,000. The management plan for Marshall Creek WMA

addresses the maintenance costs associated with noxious weed management, timber management, fencing, roads, and signage. The maintenance expenses associated with weed management, roads, fire suppression and signage are expected to be about \$36,000 per year.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. The sale of this land to TNC/TPL and subsequent sale and title transfer to FWP would not change the tax revenues that Missoula County currently collects on these lands. FWP is required by Montana Statute (87-1-603, MCA) to pay “to the county a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen.” Current taxes on this land are approximately \$18,720 per year based on the current assessment.

B. Economic Impacts

The maintenance and enhancement work that would be needed on the Marshall WMA would generate positive economic activity for local businesses. As mentioned above, FWP expects to spend about \$150,000 dollars over a 5-year period to improve and maintain the WMA.

While the acquisition of this property may not increase the total number of hunter and angler days in this area, the purchase would ensure that these activities continue at their current levels. The Marshall WMA is in Hunting District 285. Hunters (both resident and nonresident) spent over 35,000 days pursuing deer and elk in this hunting district and generated more than \$3 million dollars in direct expenditures. Angler day estimates are not available for the waters within the proposed Marshall WMA; however, angling also provides a substantial financial boost to business in the Seeley Lake area.

In addition, the purchase would open opportunities for other recreational activities such as wildlife viewing, mountain biking, etc., which would contribute to the economic well-being of local businesses.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The fee title purchase of the Marshall Creek WMA by FWP would provide long-term protection for wildlife habitat and habitat connectivity between the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wilderness and Mission Mountains, maintain the open space integrity of the land, enhance public recreation opportunities and improve the condition of the riparian areas.

This purchase would not reduce the tax revenues that Missoula County collects on this property under Montana Statute (87-1-603, MCA).

The financial impacts to local businesses from this purchase would be positive given that recreational opportunities would not be negatively impacted and FWP would be working to address weed issues, road and fence maintenance, as well as fire and timber issues.

100 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of \$6.00 per copy, for a total cost of \$600.00, which includes \$600.00 for printing and \$0 for distribution.
